

*Backpocket Book Series*

**BETWEEN THE EARS SKILLS:**

*An Athlete's Guide to Building Mental Muscle*

BY

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The goal of this book is to support individuals who desire change and improvement in his or her current level of performance. Although this book's title is geared towards athletes, high pressure situations are found outside of the world of sports and individuals from other professions will also find the information contained in this book to be useful. This book targets the main foundation building blocks of success: motivation, confidence, mindset, managing performance-related anxiety, goal-setting, recovering from setbacks, and creating your own personal recipe for success. The tips and techniques are relatively simple and straightforward. As such, this book provides general guidelines and is not a substitute for coaches, trainers, dietitians/nutritionists, or peak performance coaches/consultants.

The series title, "Backpocket Books", refers to the book's small size and ability to literally fit into a backpocket. Figuratively, these books cover concepts that you will pass through and

master on your way to success (borrowing the term from CB radio lingo).

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## **I. MOTIVATION: Igniting & Maintaining One's Inner Fire**

*People often say that motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing--that's why we recommend it daily.*

—ZIG ZIGLAR

You just did something totally awesome. Did you catch it? Somehow, amidst all of the distractions in your life, you've taken the time and made the decision to purchase, download, and crack open this book. That is no coincidence. You actively used volition and here you are.

Pat yourself on the back. You've given yourself a gift. The opportunity to learn new skills. To grow, develop, and hone new highly effective habits. Reading this book isn't as juicy as eating a ripe summer peach and it probably won't provide you the warm fuzzy of your favorite fleece sweatshirt on a cool, fall evening. If you're reading this book, you're planning on rolling up your sleeves and taking time to invest in yourself. Getting a little dirty

and spending some time out of your usual comfort zone. You're willing to risk discomfort and change for the potential of improved performance (potential only because you actually have to do the things mentioned in the book, not just read them). This is why you are awesome.

### **So...why are you doing this?**

Of course it is because you're awesome (as just mentioned), but there's likely some other factor, such as an event or person, that has prompted you to do this.

It might be because:

- You're highly frustrated with where you are right now.
- You've experienced disappointment and failure.
- You're questioning if all the time and energy you put into your sport, work, or hobby is worth it.
- You're ready to perform at a higher level and achieve greater success.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

*Understanding your own source of motivation is a highly valuable piece of information.*

### **The “P” Factors: Pain & Pleasure**

Human behavior is goal-oriented and that goal falls the two broad categories: pain or pleasure. They both are good at motivating behavior. Decreasing your driving speed when you see a police car with a radar gun is an example of being motivated by pain (the fear of getting a speeding ticket, higher insurance costs). Staying up all night to cram for an exam or complete a project is likely motivated by pain (fear of getting a bad grade or losing your job). Although pain can be a good motivator, it also brings along some unnecessary stress.

Motivation by pleasure is an alternative source of motivation that reduces or eliminates stress altogether. Instead of running away from something (pain, fear); being motivated out of pleasure helps you move towards your goal.

We'll talk more about goals later, but you definitely want them. Knowing what you don't want can be helpful, particularly for short-term goals. However, for the most part, focus your behavior on achieving what you want. Running away from fear, pain, discomfort is stressful and reactive. Running toward a goal (pleasure) is exciting and proactive. Ironically, it is often the fear of failure or not performing well that decreases performance (e.g., increasing muscle tension, distracting thoughts).

*Be miserable. Or motivate yourself. Whatever has to be done, it's always your choice.*

—WAYNE DYER

### **How to Use Internal & External Motivators**

Internal and external motivators can be very helpful. However, it is important to use them in an appropriate and responsible manner.

*For mundane, boring tasks and chores, what is one simple thing you can do to make the task more enjoyable? Would listening to some music be*

*helpful?* Personally, I'm a coffee drinker. Sitting down to complete mundane paperwork is much more enjoyable with my favorite beverage.

*Would rewarding yourself after you complete the task be motivating?* External rewards, especially with activities we dislike, can be a useful motivator (e.g., watch your favorite television show after completing homework).

For larger tasks, break them down into smaller steps. *Ask yourself, what would it feel like to make one step towards this awesome goal?*

Chances are that taking a step, even if it's temporarily unpleasant, will be overridden by the enjoyment of having taken a step to an important goal. Stop wasting energy thinking about doing something. Instead, refocus that mental energy on how good it would feel to reach that ultimate goal and to do something to bring you one step closer to reaching it.

## **Beyond Pleasure & Pain**

Pain and pleasure motivators are simple and

rather straight forward. There are times when these won't cut it and it is important to be aware of several other highly effective motivators. **The Self-Determination Theory tells us people are also motivated by: feeling competent, autonomous and independent, and a sense of connection to others.**

*Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day;  
teach a man to fish and you feed him for a  
lifetime.*

—MAIMONIDES

### **Motivating Others**

When we are motivated by thoughts or emotions, such as fear, we are being motivated by *internal motivators*. When we are being motivated into action by something external to us, such as an angry bear who wants to eat us for lunch, we refer to this as an *external motivator*. **The best motivation comes from internal motivation.** Excellent leaders and coaches recognize this and avoid using external motivation. When possible, make every attempt to encourage internal

motivation.

You remember how it was just mentioned that people are also motivated by feeling competent, autonomous, and connected to others? Well, listen up coaches, leaders, and other individuals who strive to motivate others as this is critical information for you! These three factors are all feelings that originate inside a person. In a moment, you'll see how sometimes an outside or external motivator is beneficial, but fueling internal motivation in a person is a much more effective method. I use the word "fueling" here instead of creating. We cannot control how someone feels, but we can do things to help guide a person to experience a certain feeling.

***Example of Internal Motivation:*** A child studies for his or her upcoming science test without prompting from parent.

**Note:** Parents need to butt out of this situation. Do not attempt to "sweeten" this experience for the child by offering to provide an external reward, such as money or food.

This could reduce the child's internal motivation and, in this situation, the very last thing we want to happen.

**Example of External Motivation:** Parent tells child, "I will give you \$5 for every A on your report card."

*Why is this unfortunate?* It ignores that learning is a process and the importance of learning itself. What happens during a semester is just as, if not more, important than a final grade on the report card. ***Encouraging the joy of learning is one of the most valuable gifts adults can offer children.*** Secondly, the final product, in this case the grade, should be viewed as the "icing on the cake." Icing makes a cake extra yummy, but icing without the cake is just a mass of sticky goo lacking substance. Future employers or clients will not care what grades you received on your report card in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade (or even in graduate school). They will care about the skills you possess!

**Encouragement Vs. Praise**

Encouraging statements, not praise, by the parent are beneficial. These sound like, “Billy, I see that you’re really taking this test seriously and putting in a lot of effort into your studies. That makes me very proud of you. I’m excited to hear about all the neat things you are learning!”

### **Quick Tip: Keep Internal Motivation Internal!**

Don’t mess with someone’s internal motivation! Adults, usually parents, want to focus on end products (e.g., scoring a goal, getting “good” grades). If you want to reinforce and support your child, let them know that you’re aware of the hard work and effort he or she are putting into their studies, activities, chores, etc. **You want them to know that you care about them, not what they do or can do for you!**

### **The Correct Way to Motivate Others**

Sometimes, a person needs help increasing their internal motivation. Remember, we cannot control how someone feels, but we can help them increase their internal motivation.

Read on for an example that uses the motivators of competence, autonomy, and sense of connection to increase a child's internal motivation.

***Example of Adult Encouraging a Child's Internal Motivation:*** Parent sees a child is procrastinating and not wanting to study for an upcoming exam.

Parent: "Billy, I get the sense that you are not looking forward to your science test."

Child: "Uh, yeah." (complete with blank, "Duh!" stare).

Parent: Do you think there's anything I can do to make studying easier for you?

Child: "Uh....[expect pause and silence] Well, I study best at the dining room table, but it's still covered with dishes from dinner."

Parent: "Would it be helpful if we cleaned off the table together so you can get started studying?"

Child: "Uh...I guess so."

Parent: "Great! Let's do that."

Child: "Okay."

Adapt these words/phrases as needed to make sense in your world. The bottom line is to get the individual (child) to come up with his or her own suggestions and ideas. As parents, teachers, or coaches, we want to support them and guide them. Also, make sure not to rush the process. *If a child is unable to come up with their own ideas, offer several options for them to select from.* Remember, this is a great time to boost motivation using competence, autonomy, and sense of connection to others.

### **Other Motivational Tidbits:**

1. Be very clear and specific about what motivates you. If you are struggling, trying out some of the following motivators. Which of the following motivates you the most?
  - Social Acceptance
  - Feeling Important
  - Being Comfortable
  - Sense of Control
2. Do any of these reasons conflict with one another? If so, which one wins out?

3. In an athletic or business organization, what are some of the shared goals? Be cognizant and sensitive to cultural differences.
4. If you are a leader or coach, it is important to recognize the importance of knowing how to motivate your athletes. Nonetheless, ***it is recommended to provide 3 to 12 positive comments for every one (1) criticism.***

*You can motivate by fear and you can motivate by reward. But both of those are temporary. The only lasting thing is self-motivation.*

—HOMER RICE

## **2. CONFIDENCE: Source of Success or Root of Ruin**

*Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit at home and think about it. Go out and get busy.*

—DALE CARNEGIE

**True or False: We can never have too much confidence? Performance problems always come from having too little confidence.**

False! Although confidence is often talked about in black-and-white terms, as either having it or not having it, confidence is actually not that straightforward. Having either too little or too much confidence will hurt your performance.

### **The Confidence Curve**

Think of confidence as a hill (or upside “U”). To the left of the hill, confidence levels are low but they keep increasing as you get closer to the top of the hill. At the top of the hill is your

perfect amount of confidence. But if you keep on increasing your confidence level, you're prone to becoming overconfident and your performance starts to decline. **Yes, too much confidence hurts.**

If things are feeling easy and you're not getting stretched and out of your comfort zone, you're at risk of experiencing a plateau or standstill in your growth. You might want to consider taking your game up a notch. We all like swinging at easy pitches from time to time. But what does it feel like to connect with a wickedly fast fastball that's flying straight at you? That's exhilarating and exciting!

### **Confidence (Kind of) Deconstructed**

Confidence is a complex concept and research has identified a number of different factors that contribute to it (much more than will be covered in this book). The main factors that are tied to confidence include both internal and external factors.

**Internal factors related to your confidence level are:**

- thoughts and feelings
- mindset
- behaviors
- history of success

Later chapters of this book will delve more into thoughts and feelings, mindset, and behaviors connected with success and confidence. For now, just be aware that all of these factors can influence a person's confidence.

**External factors that can have an impact on your confidence include:**

- coaches
- peers and teammates
- family

Who are the five people that you spend most of your time with? Do they bring you up and support you? Through what kind of lens do they perceive the world – is the glass half full or half empty)? It's okay to have some view the world with the glass half empty perspective, but if everyone around you sees the glass half empty, you might want to

consider spending time around those that see the glass half full, too. An important part of learning is falling flat on your face from time to time. A good support system will laugh and/or cry along with you. Your social environment can be a source of drama and distraction. Or, it can be a buoy and a boost to your confidence.

***Does it matter where your confidence comes from?*** Yes. It is crucial to have your confidence come from internal sources (e.g., self-appreciation, openness to learning from failure, acknowledging our effort and work).

Confidence built upon external factors, such as the number of awards you've received, the type of car you drive, is likely to crumble and become unstable during life's challenges.

True confidence helps the healing process after such situations. Individuals with externally based confidence are more at risk of shame and self-degradation. Not only does this interfere with the healing process, these individuals

often don't give themselves the opportunity to learn from their experiences. Painful experiences are swept under the rug and they return to their old behaviors and fail to learn new, more effective ones.

Often, people confuse confidence with receiving approval from others. Although getting a high five from a coach or teammate are good, positive strokes, solid confidence comes from the ability to continually pat your own back.

**When it comes to confidence, here are a couple of things to keep in mind:**

- Choose a “growth” mindset that allows you to be open to new experiences, getting out of your comfort zone, and remember that failure is an acronym for “First Attempt In Learning” (more about the “growth mindset” in chapter three).
- Choose who you spend your time with wisely. Make sure that you share similar goals and your interactions create a warm,

positive environment. A toxic environment can hinder confidence, motivation, focus, and ability to perform at your best.

*There is a difference between conceit and confidence. Conceit is bragging about yourself. Confidence means you believe you can get the job done.*

—JOHNNY UNITAS

### **Quick Tip: Child Athletes & Confidence**

For talented child athletes, it is recommended that their trophies and awards are kept outside of their bedroom. Let them act like “normal” kids their age and reinforce that who they are is more important than what they are good at or have accomplished.

### **3. MINDSET: Failure is a Choice**

*We are all lying in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.*

—OSCAR WILDE

Money does not guarantee happiness. Physical beauty does not guarantee everlasting love. Intelligence does not guarantee success. If you haven't already met them, there are some very unhappy rich people. Countless number of Hollywood beauties who have had their hearts broken by experienced disloyal partners. GPA, SAT, and ACT scores may look great on a college application, but they hold no significance in regard to the success a person can or will achieve in life.

**What is important is your mindset.** This is your perspective on life. Your willingness to stretch your mind and learn new ideas, try out new behaviors, and the belief that success is a process and not a final destination.

## **Growth Vs. Fixed Mindsets**

Psychologist Carol Dweck conducts research on mindset. Her work has identified two main types of mindset: fixed and growth. As early as kindergarten, Dweck has been able to identify a person's mindset. A fixed mindset perceives situations as win/loss, good/bad, success/failure. This black-and-white type mindset indicates a person's self-worth is based upon the result of his or her behavior. Children with the fixed mindset often requested easier puzzles when they started struggling to work through the more challenging ones. Life becomes a lot more stressful and difficult when every situation is perceived as an opportunity to look "right" or "wrong".

Alternately, the growth mindset sees color instead of black-white of the fixed mindset. The growth mindset views failure and making mistakes as a natural part of learning and success. This mindset views learning, not the end result, as winning. We can thank people like Thomas Edison for his willingness to continually seek out the right materials

required to create the light bulb. He perceived each of those 10,000 plus attempts as a part of the learning process.

***The fixed mindset actually inhibits success because the possibility of experiencing failure is greater than the desire to succeed.*** Are you willing to risk looking “foolish” to be successful?

*Life is change. Growth is optional. Choose wisely.*

—UNKNOWN

### **Quick Tip: The Right Kind of Perfectionist**

Some people, especially those with perfectionistic tendencies, perform better when they perceive an audience as supporting them and wanting them to perform well. Individuals who perceive the audience as being unsupportive and critical don't perform as well.

*Worrying that others are judging your*

*performance? Switch from worrying about doing something wrong to perceiving them as being supportive and wanting you to succeed. Then, focus on what you're (supposed to be) doing – e.g., dribbling the ball, swinging the golf club.*

**Question: What number is 11?**

Before I tell you the answer, how sure are you? 100%? 50%? Would you bet your house/car/first child on your response?

There are actually two correct answers! This is both the Arabic number eleven and the Roman number two.

How confident were you in your answer? Mental flexibility goes along with the growth mindset. You might have your initial response, but do you get married to it? How quickly are you able to adapt to change?

*It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.*

— CHARLES DARWIN

### **Inner Chatter**

Be aware of how you are talking to yourself and your inner mental chatter. Are things constantly being judged as good or bad/right or wrong? Are you constantly “*should-ing*” on yourself? Freud called this the Ego.

Transactional Analysis refers to it as the “Parent” script. Regardless, it is important to become aware of that script and replace it with more positive and less judgmental thoughts.

*When you talk, you are repeating what you already know. But if you listen, you may learn something new.*

—DAVID ROADS

Your best work and greatest creativity will occur when you are relaxed, calm, and (mentally and emotionally) collected. Tension and stress waste energy and are unnecessary distractions. Let your creative juices “flow”; they are much harder to extract when they are

being “crushed” out.

**Quick Tip: Mindset & Learning from the Past**

Remember, we can't control the past or the future. Many things have and will happen to us that we did not ask for. **However, we can control how we respond to these events.**

Embrace your ability to decide how this event or situation will impact your life. We can decide how we want to move forward. We can choose to learn and grow from all of our experiences, even the ones full of strife and heartbreak.

*Things turn out best for the people who make the best of the way things turn out.*

—JOHN WOODEN

#### **4. GOAL SETTING: *Finding your finish line & marking your course***

*The trouble with not having a goal is that you can spend your life running up and down the field and never score.*

—BILL COPELAND

Have you ever heard of a marathon without a finish line? Tried playing basketball without a hoop? A golf course without holes? Where would you aim your shots? How would you know if you were successful or not? In the same way, if you want to be successful in your sport and to improve your performance, you must identify where you want to go.

*The successful warrior is the average man, with laserlike focus.*

—BRUCE LEE

Do you cut through a forest of challenges and obstacles like butter one day, but crash into

nothing but brick walls and dead ends the next? Feeling unstoppable yesterday, but unable to break out of your rut today? Why does this happens? What can I do about it? Well, I'm glad you asked!

Researchers blind-folded subjects and told them to walk in a straight line. Instead of walking in a straight line, the subjects ended up walking in a “line” that was akin to a bowl of cooked spaghetti noodles. In fact, the subjects were likely to wander aimlessly and end up in the exact same place as where they started.

That's not your goal. That's a waste of your energy and time.

Setting goals and working towards them is something done by a very, tiny group of people. In fact, according to Dan Miller, a counselor who makes a living helping people create their dream jobs, only eight percent of the population have specific, concise goals and only three percent of the population write

down their goals on a piece of paper. Be different! Be successful! Write down three specific goals you have right now (these can be what you want now, in a year, 3 years or 10 years - there is no wrong answer):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Did you notice I added a space for an extra goal? Following the Law of Motion, an object in motion tends to stay in motion. Once we get started, it's easier to keep that momentum going.

**Goals make you unstoppable.** Researcher Emily Balcetis found that when you remain highly focused on your goals, some pretty cool things can happen. First, goals impact your perception and your goals appear closer. Actually, they appear thirty percent (30%) closer.

Secondly, **goals make the process easier.** When

you remain focused on your goals, the process seems to unfold less effort and more ease. In fact, Balcetis found that it was seventeen percent (17%) easier for individuals highly focused on their goals to reach them than those who were less focused on their goals. These are people who are also heading for the same finish line as the highly focused group, just not given specific instruction to stay focused on the finish line.

**Goals help you move faster.** Balcetis's third finding from her research comparing individuals who were highly focused to those who were moderately focused, was that the highly focused group reached the finish line twenty-three percent (23%) faster! What would it be like if you moved faster? In a typical eight hour work day, that's having almost two extra hours (1.84 hours to be exact). Over a 40 hour work week, that is over nine hours of extra time that you have for hobbies, new pursuits, etc. Life is full of distractions. Using a highly focused approach helps you reach your goals

faster, easier, and as the side mirror tells us they are “closer than they appear.”

*Nothing will work unless you do.*

—JOHN WOODEN

### **Goal Setting Guidelines**

Here are a few guidelines to keep in mind when writing down your goals. It helps to have goals with the following characteristics:

- **Specific:** What is the specific behavior your goal requires from you? *I want to drink a fiber supplement daily.*
- **Clear:** Leave no room for ambiguity. What is it exactly that you need to do (if you don't know, consult with someone – a coach or trainer – who can help guide you). *One spoonful of fiber mixed with eight ounces of water, once a day, after supper.*
- **Realistic, Timely, & Straightforward:** Make sure that you can actually do the behavior, do it quickly, and decrease the risk that you will forget about it. *Today I will buy fiber supplement and keep it in the cabinet on a shelf*

*where I see it daily and it is within easy reach.*

- **Infused with your passions, values, and dreams:** the purpose of goals is to have fun and add value and meaning to your life. *I want to live a long, healthy, prosperous life and I refuse to have this goal cut short or sacrificed in any way from a preventable disease like colon cancer.*

**Quick Tip: Goals are Dynamic, Not Static**

*Constantly review, update, and adjust your goals. Goals sitting in a file or lost in a pile of papers are useless. Expose your goals to sunlight. Post them near your desk, in your car, on your bathroom mirror, etc. If you're feeling frustrated, don't push them away. Make changes to make them work in your life. Due to a number of circumstances, life does not always follow the plan we have created. Changing goals can be a good thing. As you grow and change, so will your goals and dreams.*

## **5. AROUSAL CONTROL: *Tackling anxiety and using fear to fuel your success***

*We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light.*

—PLATO

**“Stop it. Just stop it.”** Of, course! How could you forget that your nerves would instantly calm down and your worries would disappear if you just told your anxiety to “Stop”!

You’re not stupid. But, you’ve probably tried this technique at some point. As you likely realized, it is rather ineffective. The reason why this technique does not work is because a logical solution doesn’t fix an emotional “problem”. I put quotes around the word problem because my goal is to help you see that **anxiety, nervousness, and fear can be tweaked and handled in a manner to work for you rather than against you.** In addition, this

approach usually makes you feel worse as you don't like how you are already feeling and you failed at trying to change it.

Here's a not so secret, secret: There's a stigma surrounding anything mental health-related, such as feelings. Environments and organizational cultures that circulate a macho or we're "tougher than that mentality", tend to ignore feelings. Some people get highly uncomfortable hearing other people talk about their feelings. It's the hot potato that no one wants to talk about and passes off as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, we can't learn how to manage our feelings if we don't talk about them. So, here's your warning: in this chapter, you're going to learn how to handle, manage, and, even use anxiety to increase your enjoyment and performance during high-pressure situations.

### **Changing the Goal**

The first thing to realize (and maybe the most important take away from this chapter) is that *it is very difficult to "stop" a feeling or*

***emotion.*** We can change our thoughts. We can adjust our behavior. But, changing or adjusting an emotion directly is very difficult. However, with a little self-awareness and a solid “Between the Ears” toolbox, we can learn how to think and behave in a manner that changes the direction the emotional train we’re riding on is heading (or keep it going in the direction we want it to go).

*Don't let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.*

—JOHN WOODEN

### **Anxiety & Tension**

Negative emotions (anxiety, fear) can quickly lead to negative thoughts (worry, head trash). Like falling dominoes, these negative thoughts can trigger a cascade of muscle tension and additional negative thoughts. When your muscles are tense, your performance is likely to be impacted in a negative way and you are at greater risk of injury. Don't be fooled; even slight tension can lead to big implications. A

tension headache can be caused by only five percent more muscle tension than normal.

### **Developing Awareness**

To decrease anxiety, the first step is being aware that you're experiencing anxiety. Ever ridden in a car with a terrible driver? They seem oblivious to the red light they just went through and the pedestrians on the sidewalk jumping out of their way, right? Just a typical drive on a Sunday afternoon for those drivers. Well, we all have been that bad driver at some point in our lives. It's easier to blame something or someone than giving yourself the reality check that it's your own breath that stinks.

### **Steps to Increasing Self-Awareness**

1. Sit back, close your eyes, and vividly recall your best performance. Make it so clear that you can see, smell, feel, hear, and taste exactly the same way as you did during that ideal performance. What were you thinking? What were you feeling? Write those thoughts and feelings down.

2. Repeat this process for your worst performance. What were your thoughts? What were your feelings?
3. Compare your thoughts and feelings during your ideal and worst-ever performances.
4. Over the next few weeks, continue to use a mental or actual checklist to increase the awareness of your thoughts and feelings after your practices and competitions.

### **Tools to Modulate Anxiety (Arousal)**

Solution: Focus on changing your thoughts and behaviors. Your feelings will follow. Even though you can't directly change your feelings, you can change how you feel by thinking and doing something different. Your primary tools against anxiety fall under these two camps: the cognitive, mental side and the behavioral side.

### **Cognitive or “Thinking” Tools**

These are great because they are free, quick,

and effective. You can use them during practice, competition, or sitting at a traffic light. Thinking differently can feel strange. It might feel awkward, uncomfortable, weird or just plain goofy to think positively instead of negatively. Don't give up! It takes a while to replace thoughts and beliefs with new ones. I'm not going to bore you with the neuroscience behind this, but take my word. The more you practice thinking differently, the easier and more natural it will feel. Oh, also remember, you can only think one thought at a time, so make it a good one!

### **Types of Thought-Based Tools**

***Self-Talk:*** Head trash or stinkin' thinking is when you're being negative, cynical, and hard on yourself or others. Top athletes focus on what they are doing right, not what they are doing wrong.

***Imagery:*** How much time do you waste ruminating about the past or worrying about the future? Too much. Instead, spend time visualizing your ideal performance. What does

it look like? Sound like? Taste, smell, and feel like? Imagery is a powerful tool. Use it, but use it to help you reach your goal and not to practice repeating past failures.

***Meditation:*** In this digital world, there is a ubiquitous number of meditations available to use. Experiment by downloading free apps to your smart phone, tablet, or computer.

Meditation is simple yet difficult. Beginners often experience “Monkey Brain” and struggle to keep their focus on their breath, visual image, or mantra. Don’t worry. Again, a little practice goes a long, long way.

### **Behavioral or Doing-Based Tools**

***Relaxation Exercises:*** Remember how I talked about anxiety increasing muscle tension? Relaxation exercises are excellent ways to decrease muscle tension. Like meditations, there are a number of different kinds available. A good behavioral tool is progressive muscle relaxation. Here you actually tense your muscles for a few seconds before releasing them and relaxing the

muscles.

***Diaphragmatic Breathing:*** This is fancy talk for using your “belly” or diaphragm muscle (located underneath your lungs) to breathe instead of your shoulders. To make sure you are using your belly (diaphragm), lie down and place your favorite stuffed teddy bear on your belly. Large books or pillows also work well. When you breathe in, Teddy should rise to the sky. When you breathe out, Teddy should be come back down to earth.

When you have too much anxiety, fear, or stress, you need to flip the switch and get that anxiety train heading in a new direction. Belly breathing calms down your nerves (to feel better), sends oxygen more to your brain (to think better), and relaxes your muscles (to perform better).

***Biofeedback:*** Biofeedback uses technology (sensors attached to different parts of the body) to help people understand how their brains and bodies are functioning at a highly

sensitive level. Think of a dimmer switch versus the traditional on-off light switch. Biofeedback is a bright idea for elite athletes and others who really want to elevate their game to the next level. Biofeedback modalities include: respiration, skin temperature, muscle tension, skin conductance (mental stress), and brain wave activity.

*Don't let the fear of losing be greater than the excitement of winning.*

—ROBERT KIYOSAKI

## **6. RECOVERING FROM SETBACKS: *Dealing with the curveballs of defeat***

*Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.*

—WINSTON CHURCHILL

*Failure is the condiment that gives success its flavor.*

—TRUMAN CAPOTE

When was the last time you did something 10,000 times? How long do you continue to work towards something despite people repeatedly telling you that you are wrong/foolish/dumb? That what you are striving for is impossible?

May I introduce you to Thomas Edison (and the light bulb), Henry Ford (and the eight cylinder engine, and that guy that ran the mile in under four minutes (Sir Roger Bannister). A sad, but true fact is that setbacks,

disappointments, and failures are a part of life. Neither is it uncommon to experience backlash, skepticism, nor resistance from others, even from the ones closest to us.

These experiences may get you down. But, hopefully, that is only temporarily. It is how you decide to move forward (or not) that determines whether you stay down or launch yourself into a period of considerable learning, growth, and development. The mindset that you use during times of struggle can either restrict your progress or unshackle you from ineffective, irrational, and damaging beliefs and emotions.

*Develop success from failure. Discouragement and failure are two of the surest stepping stones to success.*

—DALE CARNEGIE

### **Steps to Moving Forward:**

- **Embrace, Do Not Erase Your Struggle:** This sounds like a total no-brainer as you sit

comfortably reading this book. However, think about the last time you really felt like a fool. Big time with a capital “F” Fool. Suddenly, you might not be as comfortable as you just were a moment ago. You may be experiencing a churning in your belly or a tightening in your throat. That’s a normal response. We are human beings and our basic nature is to increase pleasure and decrease pain. Setbacks are painful. We try to avoid them as much as possible. *However, you can’t learn from something you ignore and you’re more likely to fall down that same hole again if you pretend it’s not there.* Welcome the discomfort as much as you can, but certainly don’t try to erase it as if it didn’t happen.

- **Tease out things you can control from things that you can’t control.**
  - I can control: my behavior, my thoughts, my willingness to learn, the mindset I use to approach the future, my decision to stay present in the

moment and not ruminate about the past or worry about the future, etc.

- I can't control: other people, past events, the future, the weather.

It's really pretty amazing all of the things that we can control. Be uncommon and shift your perspective internally recognize the control we do have and let go of the few we can't.

*When everything seems to be going against you, remember that the airplane takes off against the wind, not with it.*

—HENRY FORD

### **Tools to Handle & Resolve Difficult Emotions:**

1. **Meditation:** Meditation helps you get “unstuck” from a past event that may repeatedly play back in your mind. Meditation forces us to be present in the moment. It also helps us relax and release difficult emotions.
2. **Relaxation Exercises:** Progressive muscle relaxation, autogenic training, and guided relaxation exercises provide similar benefits

as meditation.

3. **Positive Thinking:** You can only have one thought at a time so you can't think negatively and positively at the same time. Choose wisely.
4. Reappraising a situation into a more positive frame (and this is also usually more realistic as well).
5. Eject thoughts of self-blame and replace with words of self-acceptance and kindness.

*I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life – and that is why I succeed.*

—MICHAEL JORDAN

## **Tools to Foster Growth & Improve Future Performance**

1. *Gather information.* Put down your judge's gavel and instead pretend that you're a detective gathering information. Don't judge or blame; just collect data and answer relevant W's (Who, What, When, and

Where).

2. *Evaluate your pre-competition and competition preparation plans.* Don't have one? Well, this would be a good time to start using one. For a free preparation plan, visit [www.professionaledge.co](http://www.professionaledge.co).
3. *Revisit your goals.* Stoke the goals that inspire you and get you excited. Ask yourself, "Am I honestly putting in the time they require?" Increasing your effort: Are you doing the bare minimum? Are you motivated by doing just enough? It's fine if you are. Expect to get similar results if you engage in the same behaviors that you always have. But what would happen if you gave yourself a nudge? What happens when you listen to your favorite music when you're doing a mundane task? It becomes a whole lot more fun and you have more energy.
4. *Watch your (inner dialogue) mouth.* So you're putting in more time, focus, and

energy into reaching your goals. Great! But how are you talking to yourself? Are you being your own bubbly cheerleader and giving yourself lots of pats on the back? Some say we need about 20 or so pats a day. There is no better way to figuratively cut yourself off at the knees and sabotage your efforts than to talk trash to yourself. If you're overcome with self-doubt, insecurity, and lack of confidence, those issues need to be address or they sneak up and hijack your success. Does talking positively to yourself feel funny or silly? Sure, especially if you are not used to it. But being highly successful and capturing your goals will be A LOT more fun!

5. If you're currently injured, please follow the advice of the medical personnel and staff that are taking care of you. It is not uncommon for athletes to question themselves or experience a loss of identity when they are recovering from an injury. Recovery is a process. The body needs time to heal. Let your body heal and make a full

recovery. *You didn't ask to get hurt, but you can ask yourself how you would like to grow and use this recovery time to help you the most in all areas or with your goals.*

Although they are difficult and challenging, recovering setbacks can be a time of intense physical and mental learning and growth. Ultimately, the goal should not just be on returning to one's previous physical level of functioning but to develop mental strength and resilience as well.

*Just when the caterpillar thought the world was ending, he turned into a butterfly.*

—PROVERB

## **7. FINDING YOUR SECRET SAUCE: *Creating a System of Success***

*The only way to do great work is to love what you do.*

—STEVE JOBS

*Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out.*

—ROBERT COLLIER

A delicious hamburger is a combination of a number of factors that together create a wonderful gastronomical experience. The savory meat combined with the sweet ketchup, the tangy pickle and the sour mustard all come together to form a wonderful combination of flavors. A mouthful of just meat, ketchup, pickle, or mustard by itself would not be nearly as enjoyable and, actually, kind of gross.

It is your thoughts, your feelings, your passions, your unique perspective and abilities

that make up your secret sauce. Good things happen when the light bulb flips on in your head, when you give with your whole heart, and you push the limits of your physical abilities. Even more amazing and great things continually happen when you infuse these areas with your passion and spirit. The goal of this chapter is to identify these factors and create your unique recipe for success.

*Each of us has a fire in our hearts for something.  
It's our goal in life to find it and keep it lit.*

—MARY LOU RETTON

## **Identifying What Really Matters To You**

*Try not to become a person of success, but rather try to become a person of value.*

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

### **Instructions:**

1. Circle your top five values from the following list.

Accomplishment	Fun
Accuracy	Generosity
Adventure	Growth
Authenticity	Happiness
Balance	Health
Beauty	Honor
Challenge	Humor
Collaboration	Integrity
Confidence	Kindness
Contentment	Love
Contribution	Loyalty
Courage	Optimism
Creativity	Orderliness
Determination	Patience
Discovery	Peace
Effortlessness	Perfection
Excellence	Recognition
Fairness	Strength
Family	Tradition
Forgiveness	Trust
Freedom	Wisdom
Friendship	Other: _____

2. Draw a line through three of your five.
3. Draw a line through one of the two remaining values.

**Congratulations!** You have just identified your number one value. There is nothing more fulfilling than doing something that brings

values to your life and to the lives of others. Work often does not feel like work when you are fueled by your personal values and passions. If you're experiencing burnout, this is probably a good time to check-in with your personal values and see if they are adequately being nourished and nurtured.

### **The Core of Your Success**

*Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going.*

—JIM RYUN

Think of values as the foundation and basic structure of a strong house. They are the building blocks of success. After the main structure is formed, the rest of the house can be individualized to best fit your personality, needs, wants, goals, etc. You need to create a routine that magnifies your strengths and makes it almost impossible for you not to perform at your highest.

## **Creating Success Everyday**

*The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary.*

—VIDAL SASSOON

Knowing and exercising your personal values and passion is important for performing at your best, but it's not enough. You must also be playing at the top of your mental, emotional, and physical game, too. Working with your coach(es), trainer(s), and mentor(s) are needed for you to reach your physical best and to develop the necessary technical skills required of your sport.

Creating a comprehensive daily routine helps you practice your physical and technical skills as well as your “Between The Ears” mental and emotional skills. When you are creating your recipe for success, you need to consider the following:

- How much sleep do you require to perform at your best?

- What foods do you need to eat (or avoid) for your best energy?
- What thoughts do you need to be thinking?
- What imagery exercises are you doing and when?
- What relaxation exercises are you doing and when?

After practices and competition, take a moment to reflect on your performance. Assess your physical performance as well as your motivation, confidence, energy level/anxiety management, recovery from challenges, and connection to your core values. Performing at your best is a dynamic process that requires constant refinement and fine-tuning. As you learn and grow, you will need to make necessary adjustments to continue this process and avoid stagnation. For a free outline to help you start creating your personal recipe for success, please visit [www.professionaledge.co](http://www.professionaledge.co).

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